TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

Troilus and Cressida, perhaps the bleakest of all Shakespeare's plays, presents itself as a wildly witty travesty of antiquity's greatest heroes. Shakespeare's message seems to be that heroes are not heroes, because they are either fools or knaves, and that love is a sham and deception. The atmosphere is very different from that of *Antony and Cleopatra,* so different that many interpreters can render the change intelligible only by supposing disappointments in love undergone by the Bard. Such explanations appeal to modern readers, who, under the persisting influence of Romanticism, understand writers as chroniclers of their own personal histories or their moods, sublime reproductions of the way most of us approach things. The notion that a writer overcomes his particular experience or feeling in the name of a more comprehensive and less personal view of things is rejected and treated as antipoetic, although this suggestion is enunciated by Shakespeare himself and discussed even in this play. It is more a commentary on ourselves that we take the autobiographical explanation as truth, when it is little better than an assertion, and an implausible one at that. We should at least consider that Shakespeare looks at the ancient heroes and love under different aspects in different plays and that each of the aspects is part of a total vision. Why should a man generally understood to be of such divine gifts not be able to discipline his thoughts? He may very well have used his moods to understand the psychology of the passions, that is, to reveal the human situation, not

All parenthetical citations in this chapter are to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida,* ed. Kenneth Palmer, Arden Edition (1982; rpt. London: Routledge, 1989).

merely his personal experiences. The play, which actually exists and which we can keep before our eyes, has to be understood prior to our speculating about the poet's motives, which we really cannot know apart from their product, the play. Otherwise the unknowable becomes the basis for interpreting the knowable. These reflections are induced by reading the play itself, for it is most baffling. The high good humor, the outrageous anachronisms, and the ridiculing of a tradition that Shakespeare seems elsewhere to admire so highly, puzzle us. *Troilus and Cressida* contains very great poetry, but its form and its rhetorical character, including long speeches that could hardly be understood from the stage, seem to argue a dramatic failure. It is one of those plays that seem impossible to categorize as either comedy or tragedy.

Certainly if *Antony and Cleopatra* instills nostalgia in us, this play is the corrective of that dangerous sentiment. Nostalgia undermines the present in the name of the past, a historical moment that can never be reproduced, and ends up in empty snobbism. Here Shakespeare debunks the past, but it is not true that nothing is left standing. Nothing is left standing in the eyes of those who regard glory and love as the two greatest and most interesting human motives. But if, to put it bluntly, this is a play about wisdom, a thing neither understood nor desired by most people, then many of the play's formal difficulties disappear. One character, Ulysses, emerges, if in an understated way, triumphant. Shakespeare suggests in *Troilus and Cressida* that wisdom, austere and externally unattractive, is the one thing permanently available to man that is noble and choiceworthy. The difficulty Shakespeare has in presenting this theme is the old Platonic one: the lively and intense passions are what the imitative arts can depict, whereas the wise man (e.g., Socrates) has no important role on the stage that mirrors life. This is the same problem, in another guise, that Shakespeare grapples with in *The Tempest,* that is, how a wise man can be made interesting amid the passions, despite the popular lack of understanding of wisdom and distaste for it. Glory and love, always attractive and interesting, are central to *Troilus and Cressida,* but their splendor is dimmed by the corrosive of reason, and they become in the plot means to the ends of Ulysses. Just as Ulysses in Homer's *Iliad* is hardly a favorite character, Ulysses is not much liked in *Troilus and Cressida* and is very underrated by its critics. Prospero, the magician, can hold center stage. Ulysses, the intriguer and debunker, appears

peripheral to the play's central action. But for a few choice viewers or readers he represents the consolation of philosophy in a dark world.

The characters in the play are very preoccupied with posterity's judgment and recognize that their glory depends upon poets. Shakespeare really gives it to them. The only person who comes out looking good in the popular eye is Troilus, and even he seems a bit silly. This play is written by an extremist who pulls no punches. Shakespeare chooses to represent the Trojans as much superior to the Greeks, a very different picture from that given by the evenhanded Homer. This allows Shakespeare to treat the victorious heroic tradition in an irreverent way. The Trojan men generally live up to their legends, idealists of honor, whereas the Greek heroes are painted in a most repulsive light, but one that reflects something of what they really were. The rulers are not wise, the heroes are not honorable, and there are no lovers among them. The presence of Ulysses helps to bring all of this out or makes it worse than it might ordinarily appear to be, but it is all too evident even without him, and Shakespeare's play would seem to correct a great historical error, the burden of which misleads men of later ages. It is Achilles, the hero of all heroes, who is most transformed, and Shakespeare thereby makes much more central what Plato hinted at in the *Republic.*[1]

This play inserts erotic motives behind the actions of the various heroes in a way that is not evident in Homer, but it follows and enhances the erotic motive alleged to have been at the root of the Trojan War. The struggle for the possession of Helen's beauty was supposed to explain or give sufficient reason for the great sufferings and heroic deeds of this war. The love of the beautiful can be considered a noble motive for great dedication and great sacrifices in a way that the quest for money or land cannot be. The Greeks and the Trojans elevated war by their ideals. *Troilus and Cressida* demotes the war by ridiculing its motives. This is exactly what Herodotus does at the beginning of his *History.*[2] He does so in order to put the Persian War in the place of the Trojan War as a truly noble war. Shakespeare, however, presents no such noble alternative and in that resembles Thucydides, who leaves understanding as the only satisfaction arising from the contemplation of the ugliness of political history. The opposition between Venus and Mars is underlined and undermined at the same time.

One of the peculiarities of the play is its turning the Greek and Trojan, especially the Trojan, warriors into knights who, in the great tra-

dition of chivalry, have great ladies for whom they fight and whose combats are enclosed in high, ridiculous forms. In *Troilus and Cressida,* this reaches its peak with the combat between Hector and Ajax, where each falls over the other with terms of endearment and the enunciation of shared principles of honor. Not the slightest harm is done by either to the other. The background of this combat is senseless slaughter of both Greeks and Trojans. Thus the high principles, the gentlemanliness of the leading combatants, is ridiculed, and the ugliness of the war revealed. In reading this play, one cannot help being reminded of the First World War, in which so many died for slight or even nonexistent goals. During a large part of this war there were civil and formal relations between aristocratic French and German officers, beautifully captured in Jean Renoir's film *Grand Illusion.* The difference between Renoir and Shakespeare is that Renoir solemnly teaches us about the vanity of war whereas Shakespeare presents this picture with unfailing gaiety. Folly is a permanent feature of human existence. The playwright cannot change that and can at best offer us consolation in laughter and the insight laughter brings with it. Never does he sermonize. The spoof of Christian chivalry in the context of the Trojan War, inherited from Chaucer, permits Shakespeare also to raise the question of the motives of classical warriors.

We are introduced to the play in a scene where Troilus has chosen not to go to war today because he is love-moody. The war is treated as something one can participate in or not according to whether one feels like it that day. Erotic life is viewed from a double perspective, as a war between the sexes and as a much more pleasant way of spending one's time than fighting. This picks up on a theme mentioned, but not insisted on, in the *Iliad,* where Paris is spirited away from the battlefield by Aphrodite to the bed of Helen and is chided for his sport by the ever serious Hector. The opposition between the erotic life and the most serious activity of politics, war, is the central message of this first scene, but it is never forgotten that this war as a whole is fought for Helen, so that the toils of war are means to the end of peaceful enjoyment of beauty. This robs of its intrinsic nobility the heroic fighting of an Achilles, and if Helen is a whore, then its instrumental nobility also disappears, as does the dignity of love. This is what Ulysses' action in the play accomplishes. It will ultimately restore peace, but peace that is lived merely for the sake of life, without the glory of war or the grace of eros.

Most of the love talk in this play rings false, and at best reminds us of a Ginger Rogers–Fred Astaire romance. Pandarus, the go-between, has a superficial urbanity and is a big booster of sexual connections, as opposed to either marriages or grand loves à la Romeo and Juliet or Antony and Cleopatra, where no go-betweens are needed. He is a character reminiscent of Viennese light opera. All these associations to literary types who have nothing to do with Homer show something about the range of Shakespeare's understanding of kinds of relatedness among men and women. When I was young I saw Tyrone Guthrie's production of *Troilus and Cressida,* and all I remember about it is that he made the meeting between the Greek and Trojan heroes in Act IV into a cocktail party, and it played very well as such. Shakespeare shows us real love, acted out solo by Troilus; gallantry, described by Rousseau as a parody of love, a routine form of passion with the certainty of consummation, represented by Pandarus, Helen, and Paris; and simple looseness and whorishness, played by Cressida and Diomedes. Ulysses is the only one who has nothing to do with anything of this, although he is a shrewd observer of it.

After Troilus' earnest but sophomoric love talk in scene i, we get Cressida playing the perfect coquette, prior to her descent into wantonness, with Pandarus. Whatever our prejudices about the appropriate behavior for men and women, we see immediately that someone who talks like Cressida cannot be serious. She plays the game of not taking Troilus seriously, and comparing him unfavorably with the other Trojan heroes who pass across the stage and upon whom she comments to Pandarus. And she proves her ecumenism by asking how Troilus would compare with the Greek Achilles, thus giving us a harbinger of her later conduct. She is much too experienced with sexual acts and sexual organs to be thought to be in any way innocent, or to respect their deeper meaning and mysteriousness. With her, it all hangs out. The innocent Juliet desires with purity and awe; Cleopatra knows it all and is witness to the qualitative superiority of Antony in the act. When Pandarus asserts that Helen loves Troilus, Cressida responds, "Troilus will stand to the proof" (I.ii.131). Exclusivity is not within Cressida's ken, and she accepts with urbanity Troilus' presumed bodily movements when attended to by Helen. When Pandarus describes Troilus as a man of good nature and liberal education, Cressida remarks that these are the qualities of "a minced man; and then to be baked with no date in the pie, for then the man's date is out" (I.ii.261–

262). Date refers to Troilus' intimate parts. It is not that Cressida speaks frankly in a "pagan" style; it is that this is all common currency for her. Hers is a lustful statement of what we know as the sexual teachings of Masters and Johnson. When, at the end of scene ii, she has a soliloquy in which she professes her seriousness about Troilus, one recognizes that it is a very relative seriousness indeed. She explains her coyness as a means to ensure Troilus' seriousness. By experience or report, she knows that men are likely to despise what they get easily. She wants to appear difficult in order to maintain the upper hand after as well as before. She understands ordinary sexual relations to be a mere alternation of mastery and slavery. The disguising of her desires is only the better to satisfy them. This is a parody of a serious woman's reflections on her vulnerability. For her it is only an exercise in sexual economics. How different she is from Juliet, who recognizes the risk in giving herself so frankly, but accepts it. The acquisition of Troilus is merely an act of vanity. If she were to lose him, she would suffer from wounded pride, but not very much, because there are others where he came from.

The shift from Troy to the Greek camp in Act I, scene iii, is brutal. The Greek side is utterly unerotic, although there is a certain amount of brutish sex of the kind well known in armies. Here one finds a public debate about what is going wrong in the war. There are two ridiculous speeches, formal orations full of the commonplaces of public moral discourse, one by the king of kings, the shepherd of the host, Agamemnon, the other by his supporter and wise counselor, the aged Nestor (I.iii.1–54). These speeches are meant to hearten the host, but they are platitudes worthy of a current State of the Union address and could not arouse anyone. To a certain extent, they are cover-ups for the incompetence of the leaders. The difficulty, as is well known from the *Iliad,* is that Achilles is quarreling with the generals and keeping to his tent. But this is not mentioned by the speakers, who respond to the low morale in the army by explaining that the war is taking so long and costing so many men because of its place in the providential scheme of things. According to Agamemnon, this is Jove's way of testing the Greeks and showing what they are. Both speakers base themselves on a Stoic public morality, which, in distinguishing between virtue and fortune, makes human worth depend on

the former while it holds out against the blows of the latter. True happiness is virtue, and the virtuous man will be happy and most himself when fortune is most hostile and he holds out against it. Dumb luck can procure all kinds of good things, including victory, but only those who have earned these things are truly admirable. It is an affront to human nature to say that what most counts depends on mere accident and not on the qualities of men. Therefore the current adversity is a blessing in disguise that will ensure the glory of the Greeks. Both Agamemnon and Nestor cheat a bit, probably unconsciously, in asserting that virtue is everything and then insisting that virtue will be rewarded by victory. Virtue should be its own reward, but this can never be believed by the multitude. Agamemnon and Nestor are simply haranguing the crowd in the hope that its members will learn patience.

Neither Agamemnon nor Nestor suggests that fortune can be conquered. It must be endured. Virtuous conduct is absolute and cannot alter itself to circumstances. There is in this an element of the noble classical teaching about what men must learn to live with, as opposed to modern teachings, which insist that they must be chameleons in thrall to chance. But this argument can easily turn into an excuse for idleness or stupidity. Machiavelli calls for the conquest of fortune in order to combat such passivity, which cripples the statesman's prudence and action. Although Machiavelli's generalization that what men call fortune is only the result of lack of foresight is not simply correct, there is much to it, and Ulysses' speech and the action later founded upon it are a page out of Machiavelli's book (I.iii.54–137).[3] His explanation of the problem the Greeks face amounts to an indictment of Agamemnon's inattention or incompetence, although he does not insist on making this conclusion public. Ulysses' rhetorical problem is that he has to persuade imprudent or unwise rulers of the proper course to follow, and they need not obey him as he must obey them, since his prudence or wisdom has no status in the order of things. Ulysses begins by praising Agamemnon for the position he holds and Nestor for his age. Agamemnon is king of kings because he is king of kings. There is no good reason for it. He was simply born to the position and the position must be respected. Nestor is respected for his age, since in traditional societies at least, age, simply because it is age, has authority. Reverence for the ancestral gives power, and the younger and wiser Ulysses must flatter Nestor. It is a rare thing when

wisdom can peep through these thickets into the light of day, and a consummate rhetorician like Ulysses must present its case. He succeeds by making Agamemnon and Nestor indignant that their positions are being called into question by Achilles. Ulysses' wise plans succeed because he makes them appeal to the unwise passions of his hierarchical superiors.

And it is just the overturning of this rank order of things that Ulysses blames for the current discontents. Men do not obey their superiors. Why not? Because those superiors are incompetent and do not know how to control their inferiors. Actually, this means that the superiors are only conventionally superior. Ulysses, who knows how to right the situation and, in spite of the handicaps of his position, succeeds in doing so, is the only natural ruler on the scene. But natural rulers are not real rulers.

Ulysses dresses up his proposals in cosmic clothing. There is an order in all things, beginning with the heavens themselves, of which the human orders are a part. When priority is not observed, the whole falls into chaos. The good for everything is connected with this order of ruling and being ruled. This is a statement of the Great Chain of Being, about which so much nonsense has been written and which is supposed to have provided men with moral security prior to the Enlightenment. It is another one of those organic explanations of political relations that tell us about the way things ought to be but that are in fact only ideologies. Ulysses ridicules this cosmology as it is applied to human things. It is not unlike the divine order of things relied on by Richard II, which exempts him from having to accept the responsibilities of ruling.[4] The beehive is a favorite analogy to the political order, and Ulysses uses it. But in beehives nobody has to tell the workers what they must do or who the ruler of the hive is. There are no bees sulking in their tents. One might say that the hive is the model for the way things ought to be, but this is made questionable by the fact that nature does not produce human communities in the way that it does beehives. Human communities are much more a product of force and fraud exercised by rulers. Ulysses intentionally leaves his audience in some confusion as to whether the cosmic order itself has good and bad elements that require a cosmic ruler to control them or whether that order is permanent with all the parts ultimately contributing to a common good. This confusion has something to do with events such as killer storms that are not liked by human beings and seem to indicate

disorder in the nature of things. If there were such disorder, men's rebelliousness and despair would have some justification. But if such storms are part of the good of the whole, then that whole is not necessarily friendly to human wishes or aspirations.

This beautiful cosmic picture amounts only to an indictment of the actual rulers. Ulysses presents high moral grounds, and immediately turns to a low and dishonest conspiracy to institute the proper relations of ruling and being ruled. Ulysses' speeches must be interpreted in the light of his deeds, and vice versa, for what appear to be low deeds become noble ones when understood in the light of the public good. This is Machiavelli's teaching.

Ulysses makes it clear that appetite, potentially "an universal wolf" (I.iii.121), must be subjected to power rather than allowed to make power its tool. This subjection comes from human action, not natural inclination. After his pompous elucidation of their difficulty, which has nothing to do with the fortune blamed by Agamemnon and Nestor, Ulysses gets down to cases and blames the couple, Achilles and Patroclus, as the source of rottenness in the state. This play, as I have said, ridicules almost all Greek things, and one of those well-known Greek things was pederasty. In this play, everyone takes Achilles and Patroclus to be sexually involved. The word "lovers" would be something of an overstatement, although these days the word is almost always an overstatement. This kind of sexual relation has none of the chivalry that one finds in the other kinds of connection in the play. It is treated as an expression of pride and factiousness (not particularly of lustfulness). This relationship will ultimately be politically useful, when Patroclus' death draws Achilles back into battle. The ancient view that couples of male lovers could be the source of conspiracy to overthrow tyranny, as in the case of Harmodius and Aristogeiton,[5] is not utterly rejected, if in any sense Agamemnon can be considered a tyrant.

Ulysses takes a very curious tack in describing the seditious speech of Achilles and Patroclus. He says Patroclus calls his jests "imitation." Ulysses appears to think that to call such subversive stuff imitation is a slander of imitation. Patroclus means by imitation what Aristotle means in the *Poetics*.[6] Patroclus is an artist whose art is subversive. If one looks closely at what Ulysses tells us about these "imitations," they are perfect representations of what we actually see in Agamemnon and Nestor—Agamemnon a blowhard, Nestor a doddering old

fool. Patroclus does in bed with Achilles what Shakespeare does on the stage:

> With him Patroclus
> Upon a lazy bed the livelong day
> Breaks scurril jests,
> And with ridiculous and awkward action,
> Which, slanderer, he imitation calls,
> He pageants us. (I.iii.146–151)

Shakespeare's understanding of imitation can help to enrich the stiff modern interpretations of that term. Here the imitator produces a painting of a natural understanding of the political scenery, a painting that is subversive of the official understanding. The imitator imitates nature, as opposed to convention, and that is not so simple and stupid an activity as is often thought. Ulysses pretends to want to suppress, as do all tyrants in such cases, the mockery by Achilles' boyfriend, who thus amuses his senior partner. However, Ulysses silently but powerfully promotes an appreciation of the Greek leaders similar to Patroclus'. There is no doubt that imitation can be dangerous as well as salutary for civic morals. Only the loose and liberated are capable of such imitative art. The imitations are liberating, except for the fact that the audience, in this case Achilles, also needs imitations that would not simply flatter it. The imitator is limited by the nature of his audience, and that is indeed a problem for art, a problem that only the greatest of poets can solve. All the advantages and disadvantages of imitation as discussed by Plato are discussed in this passage. Shakespeare does for us, concerning all of what is handed down to us from Greece, what Patroclus does for Achilles concerning Agamemnon and Nestor.

The trouble with Achilles, according to Ulysses, is that he is all brawn and no brains. The heroes "count wisdom as no member of the war" (I.iii.198). They esteem only the battering ram and not the one who built it or the reason that guided the builder. This thought confirms the difficulty of Ulysses' position, which we have already noted. Unfortunately, poetry itself tends to share this point of view. It celebrates the glorious deeds of the heroes and not what does or should lie behind them. Strength and rage are made to seem to be the summit of human virtue and to contain within them all the other qualities. This

is the reason why Ulysses, the wisest of the Greeks, must appear to be a very secondary character in the *Iliad,* and not a very sympathetic one at that. To repeat, wisdom is not in itself attractive. But Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida* brutally corrects the poetic preference for the warrior.

The Greek council is interrupted by the arrival of Aeneas, another of the great Trojan romantics. He is there to propose single combat between Hector and any of the Greeks who is willing to face him. It is a challenge for lovers who assert the superiority in beauty and chastity of their beloveds over those of their opponents. Aeneas appears to believe in this nonsense, whereas it is utterly alien to the Greeks. It is pride in women that leads knights to fight. Rousseau said that men no longer dueled because they no longer believed in the chastity of women or its importance.[7] Aeneas is a man of the old order. Of course, there is a political intention underlying this challenge, because the Trojans expect Achilles to take it up and thus, perhaps, in this relatively cheap way, to end the war.

Aeneas' words bring out everything that is most ridiculous in Agamemnon and Nestor. Agamemnon assures Aeneas that some of his soldiers are lovers and hence will respond to the challenge, but promises, if there are none, he will do it himself. He does not say with whom he is in love. Clytemnestra is not mentioned. Nestor goes Agamemnon one better and declares himself ready to confront Hector, asserting that his dead wife is more beautiful than Hector's grandmother. This is rendered all the more hilarious by Patroclus' imitation of Nestor with palsied hand trying to put on a suit of armor. Aeneas responds to this with "Now heavens forfend such scarcity of youth." To which Ulysses, showing his own brand of humor, appends the single word "Amen" (I.iii.301–302).

As Aeneas goes off with Agamemnon for ceremonial visits in the Greek camp, Ulysses uses the occasion to speak to Nestor, who will presumably speak to Agamemnon, about the scheme he has conceived, connected with this challenge, to correct the chaos caused by Achilles. Simply, it is to set up a crooked lottery for the choice of the Greek combatant. The result of this lottery, which will appear to be chance but is actually controlled by Ulysses, will be that Ajax will go rather than Achilles. The defeat of Ajax would not, with Achilles still

in reserve, completely dishearten the Greeks. If Ajax wins, so much the better. But in any case, Achilles will be humiliated and brought back into the order of things by the loss of reputation. Ulysses' shrewd management of this scheme is the theme of the rest of the play.

The meeting of the Greek notables is paralleled by a meeting of the Trojan notables (II.ii) that, in its way, is a real deliberation about the purposes and conduct of the war. It all turns on Helen. Old Priam has received a communication from Nestor saying that the war can be ended simply by the return of Helen and that there will be no further demands. Priam is clearly inclined to meet Nestor's demand because he grieves for the terrible losses incurred during this war and fears for the very existence of Troy. The debate is initiated by the noble and decent Hector, who argues in favor of peace. He knows that no one can doubt his courage as a warrior, so he can confidently, without fear of accusation as a coward, take the side of ending the war on grounds of compassion. He concludes his first speech by saying that reason is on his side, and the entire debate becomes a disputation about the status of reason. This is, to say the least, an unusually theoretical, even academic, dispute in a play, especially a Shakespearean play. Of course, Shakespeare is not a crudely didactic writer who uses the stage as a platform for the direct propagation of his views. The arguments are a part of the action and are incomprehensible except in relation to the characters of those who enunciate them. They are opinions suitable to the individuals and teach us something about their dominant passions, which ultimately win out against any argumentation.

Hector's primary antagonist in the debate is the idealistic Troilus. He is unhesitating and equates fear and reason. No reason can be put in the scale to counterbalance the worth and honor of his father, the king. Reason is nothing against such "infinite" proportions. When he is chided by his older brother Helenus for being empty of reason, Troilus launches into a passionate attack on reason, which he identifies, like many of our contemporary men and women, with the mere calculating arm of self-preservation, which sees in glory only vanity. He stands foursquare for the noble and the splendid and seems certain that they cannot defend themselves against reason, if reason is credited. Reason cannot prove that the sacrifice of life in defense of a woman's honor or for the common good is preferable to safety and comfort:

> if we talk of reason,
> Let's shut our gates and sleep: manhood and honour
> Should have hare hearts, would they but fat their thoughts
> With this cramm'd reason: reason and respect
> Make livers pale, and lustihood deject. (II.ii.46–50)

It is almost as though Troilus and Shakespeare had read Hobbes, who was to write the *Leviathan* fifty years later, not to say thousands of years later. Troilus' position has just one weakness: he must use reason in his attack on reason, and this fact heightens the vulnerability of the position he enunciates.

Hector argues, in keeping with Troilus' description of the use of reason, that Helen is not worth the cost of keeping her, which forces Troilus into the position of saying that a thing is worth whatever it is valued at, that value is only subjective, a thing of men's imagination or fancy. This permits Hector to respond that esteeming must be related to the nature of what is esteemed if it is not to be mere folly: "'Tis mad idolatry / To make the service greater than the god" (II.ii.57–58). This gives Troilus the occasion to make his strongest point. We do not turn back to the merchant the silk we purchased from him when it is soiled. A wife no longer attractive is not thrown away. We make commitments, and we are supposed to stick by them. Here Troilus is closest to common opinion, and what he says is a truism, the logical extension of which is sticking by the Trojan decision to kidnap Helen in the first place. However, it is only an argument from common opinion, and one can very well sympathize with the desire to exchange old silks or old wives for new ones. Otherwise, one would have to agree with Troilus that the value of things is determined simply by our act of valuing them, and morality would be reduced to keeping one's promises not because they have a good result but merely because they are one's promises. This is the morality of Cephalus in the *Republic.* Reason most certainly challenges and tends to undermine the convictions that underlie ordinary morality. Troilus is a very moral man, and one can make no headway in getting him to doubt the desirability of being so. This is why he trusts Cressida. Ulysses is going to fix that for him, and thus destroy Troilus' dangerous idealism. This play treats reasonableness as a bleak thing, while casting in its lot with it.

The sham of rational debate is rudely interrupted by Cassandra's cries and her prophecies of doom for the Trojans. The conclusion of the debate, which is that the Trojans should stick by their guns no mat-

ter what, is heightened by Cassandra's reminder that this conclusion will bring about the disaster of Troy. Troilus' immediate response to her intervention is that the justness of acts is not determined by this or that outcome. Justice is an absolute. He is seconded by Paris, who understandably wants to keep Helen and use Troy and the Trojans to enable him to do so, unlike Hector and Troilus, who are disinterested. Priam intervenes to point out Paris' evident self-interest and thus to discredit his argument. Then, in one of the strangest and most hilarious moments in this play, Hector turns to Aristotle's authority to support his position (II.ii.167). Some interpreters have said that Shakespeare probably did not know that Aristotle came hundreds of years after Homer; they provide a counterpoint almost as funny as this scene is in itself. This entire deliberation is utterly implausible. When did heroes of any kind sit around and discuss first principles, let alone use philosophic texts to support their positions? Heroes are incarnate first principles that need no discussion. The very reflection on the status of heroic action undermines such action. It is only in the light of such reflection that you can have a strumpety Helen presented as the face "that launched a thousand ships."

The ultimate cause of the comic oddness of this play is the tension between heroic naïveté and reason. The intermediary between the two poles is constituted by the sexual nature of women. Hector points out that Paris and Troilus would not have been permitted by Aristotle to engage in serious moral deliberation. They can use words very well, but the proper use of words is connected to moral character. The young are too much under the sway of the passions to weigh those passions. The two passions that most affect young people, according to Hector's Aristotle, are pleasure and revenge. Paris seems to be more motivated by pleasure and Troilus by revenge, although this is not to say that Troilus' high-minded expectation of pleasure from love does not play a role in his arguments. Revenge is a passion closely allied to love of justice and is aroused by infractions of justice. Without its activity in the soul, justice would go unarmed. Perhaps the connection between pleasure and revenge has to do with protection of one's wife. Ulysses, confirming this interpretation, describes Troilus to Agamemnon as being:

> Manly as Hector, but more dangerous;
> For Hector in his blaze of wrath subscribes

To tender objects, but he in heat of action
Is more vindicative than jealous love. (IV.v.104–107)

These descriptions reflect a Platonic or Aristotelian tripartite division of the soul into appetite, anger, and reason. Having taken this scholastic high ground, Hector is able to argue on the basis of nature, the grounds of natural right to property. Helen was Menelaus' property and is therefore owed to him. It is a law of nature. The Trojans are breaking the laws of nature, and here Hector makes a sophisticated distinction between the laws of nature and the laws of nations (the *ius naturae* and the *ius gentium*). He concludes, "Hector's opinion / Is this in way of truth" (II.ii.189–190).

But, in an absolutely astounding and unexpected peripety, Hector chooses another way than that of the truth. After piling up good reason on good reason, he says, "Yet ne'ertheless . . ." His resolution is to keep Helen for the sake of all of their dignities. Thus he seals the doom of all of them. One could not present a starker picture of the contrariety of reason and heroic action. He reaches a conclusion without any arguments that have led to it. Shakespeare paints the folly of heroic choice, choice not preceded by deliberation, as vigorously as possible. Troilus, overjoyed by Hector's flip-flop, explains it by Hector's love of glory. The charming, thrilling love of glory is the villain of this play, and it works, in different ways, in both Hector and Achilles. No explaining it, but the heroes are distinguished above all other men by choosing glory over life. To put it in Nietzschean terms, here the noble man's instinct carries the day over slavish reason. Tragedy is somehow premised on the superiority of that instinct, and this is why *Troilus and Cressida* is not a tragedy. It ridicules, more or less brutally, the effect of that passion on men individually and on politics generally. Shakespeare does this in many other places, in particular in his portrait of Hotspur, the noble opponent of the cold and calculating Hal. No wonder that Ulysses, the bearer of the bad news about glory, is not very attractive to audiences who have a preference for the heroic. Socrates knows this and tries, ridiculously, in Plato's *Apology of Socrates,* to identify himself with the hero Achilles, who is the opposite of what he himself stands for.[8] This prejudice against reason explains why Ulysses' primary role in *Troilus and Cressida* is so often misunderstood by critics. The choice, as it presents itself to the popular imagination, is between dull, ignoble reasonableness and enspirit-

ing deeds performed for the sake of the beautiful, whether one understands the word "beautiful" with respect to women of fair form or to glory.

These characteristics of heroic men are displayed in a much harsher light in the Greek camp (II.iii). Thersites, the low expression of the grievances of the vulgar against the alleged persecutions of the nobles, is transformed in this play into a fool in the medieval tradition, a clown who amuses kings and courts and has a right to say all the things nobody else is permitted to say because he does so in an amusing way and is not supposed to be taken seriously. He plays a role akin to that of Patroclus as described by Ulysses and resembles Shakespeare himself in his use of comedy. Thersites is an extreme of foul-mouthed destructiveness. He describes himself as related to the devil's envy. He is as low a character as one can imagine, and mad envy of greatness is surely his motive. But for precisely this reason, he is able to seek out the weaknesses of the great to whom he is intimately connected and by whom he is persecuted. Mostly, his theme is the lack of self-knowledge of the heroes in a play very much devoted to the problem of self-knowledge.

Vanity is the great deceiver in telling us that we are what we are not and making us dependent on public opinion. The exchanges between Thersites and Ajax and Achilles reveal their pathological vanity. Thersites tells them that they are more fools than he is, and he makes it clear that Ajax is stupid and Achilles not too bright. They are needed to beat down the Trojans and are given an opinion of themselves that identifies their dumb physical prowess with all the qualifications of the noble and the good. Thersites tells them they are merely instruments manipulated by Ulysses and Agamemnon, although they think they are ends in themselves. These observations made in such distasteful ways by Thersites are confirmed in deed on the stage as Ulysses builds up Ajax's ego at the expense of Achilles. Achilles has reached such a summit of sensitivity to his position that his palate can no longer tolerate any nourishment other than that intended for the gods. Ajax's rivalry, his lust to equal or outdo Achilles, makes him into the dupe of dupes. One sees him inflating like a balloon as Ulysses pumps him up vis-à-vis Achilles. The comedy is very broad indeed as Ajax claims that he cannot understand what vanity is

at the same time as he is, before our eyes, becoming the very exemplar of that vice.

The leading passions of Troilus and Achilles come to a climax in Act III, scenes ii and iii. In scene ii, Troilus and Cressida get together, make their declarations, and go off to their consummation. Troilus' speeches are beautiful and trusting, Cressida's coquettish. Pandarus brokers the whole thing with prurient attentiveness. There is no talk of marriage. The couple meet furtively, but *à la française,* without shame, and a rather large public is aware of what Pandarus has arranged. This situation heightens one's sense of Troilus' naive attachment to love. He seems to be utterly unaware of the circumstances, which indicate erotic levity on the part of Cressida. Troy is not like the Vienna of *Measure for Measure.* Troilus' father has been a solidly married man, and so is his brother Hector. But the moment is sufficient to satisfy expectations of eternity. Cressida complains when Troilus is about to go in the morning that all men leave too soon, not a remark made by an innocent. The scene ends with each of the three parties affirming his or her fidelity and predicting with confidence how posterity will view them. Troilus says that his name will be synonymous with truth; all men will say, "As true as Troilus." Cressida, strengthening her affirmation of her truthfulness, actually qualifies it by predicting that if she were to be false (a possibility in his own case that Troilus never even considered), her name will be idiomatic in "as false as Cressid." Pandarus casts Cressida's suggestion in a more neutral form and says, "If ever you prove false one to another," but then he accepts that it would be Cressida who would do the betraying: "let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids, and all brokers—between Pandars" (III.ii.180–202). Pandarus turns this into a prayer to which all say amen. It is a prayer that history has fulfilled, largely due to Chaucer and Shakespeare. The formula leaves Troilus as the only true person. And this is what the play teaches us. The question remains whether such unfounded idealism is simply admirable.

Act III, scene iii details Ulysses' corruption of Achilles. It is in some aspects one of the most shocking deeds in all of Shakespeare, for it leads directly to the murder of Hector by an Achilles who

no longer has any concern for nobility. Only if this deed serves a greater good can there be any justification of it. Ulysses has, in the best tradition of rhetoric, prepared Achilles to hear him. He has done so by engineering Ajax's choice as the Greek representative in the knightly combat and by orchestrating the snub of Achilles by the Greek chieftains. Achilles is confused and distressed and seeks out Ulysses on his own. He needs Ulysses and wants clarification. He is now ready to be instructed, although he does not expect what he is going to get. Achilles finds Ulysses reading. What an extraordinary conceit, a Homeric hero reading! And he is from all evidence reading *Alcibiades I*. This encounter reminds one of the procedure of Socrates. In general, Socrates attracts the students to him by engaging their vanity. They look for a kind of support from him, and he takes them on a long ride into unknown terrain to which they are receptive because of their need. No self-satisfied man is open to Socratic seduction. The first thing he does is to destroy that self-satisfaction. Socrates uses vanity while ridiculing it and attempting to destroy it. He furthers the Delphic command, "Know thyself," and points out that vanity is the great enemy to self-knowledge and the substitute for it. These students need Socrates for this moment because he gives the impression that only he can help them regain their loss of self-assurance.

Ulysses says that the writer he is reading claims that a man cannot "boast to have that which he hath" (III.iii.98) except by mirror-like reflection in others that returns his virtues to himself. There is a critical ambiguity here in that *boast* usually has the negative implication of an attempt to mislead others, although it appears to mean here merely a claim. Moreover, the formula leaves it unclear whether the man who does not possess such a mirror actually has his virtues nevertheless and is only unconscious of them, or whether the virtues are actually dependent upon being reflected in this way. Achilles is ultimately persuaded that the distinction is an empty one and that the virtues exist only in the reputation for them.

Achilles shows himself to be aware of this literature by actually quoting the sense of Socrates' observation in *Alcibiades I:*

> nor doth the eye itself,
> That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself,
> Not going from itself; but eye to eye oppos'd
> Salutes each other with each other's form;

For speculation turns not to itself
Till it hath travell'd and is mirror'd there
Where it may see itself. This is not strange at all.
(III.iii.105–111)[9]

Achilles knows the *Alcibiades I* passage but has never been perplexed by it. Ulysses makes understanding it interesting for Achilles while perverting it. He leads Achilles into believing that what counts most or even exclusively is the image projected back on himself by the mirror and not the reality that is projected into it. Achilles was, up to this point, not a very appealing fellow, but he did have a salutary belief that he deserved his reputation because of his virtues. Such a man always remains a bit unsure whether the reputation for virtue is what is most important for him or whether virtue is its own reward, with reputation simply being a superadded pleasure. Aristotle discusses this question with great delicacy in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the passage where he presents the proud man who claims great honors and deserves them. Such a man must have a certain contempt for honors, both because they come from individuals who are not his equals and hence not valid underwriters of his claims, and because virtue ought to be for its own sake.[10] There is in this description a fissure in the proud man's character that is important for the one who wishes to understand but on which it is imprudent to put too much stress, for fear that that character will split apart. This is the problem with the morality of the public man. Ulysses does put such stress on this historic model of the proud man and leads Achilles down the Machiavellian path that reputation for virtue is virtue, and that any means, fair or foul, are appropriate to getting that reputation. The plausibility of this conviction is attested to by the fact that Achilles kills Hector in the most ignoble way and gets perhaps the most brilliant reputation of any man in history by means of Homer's celebration of his deed. Shakespeare helps to correct this poetic abuse, but his correction does not lead in the direction of restoring the love of the kind of virtue professed by men like Achilles.

Ulysses speaks the best poetry in the play in the service of persuading Achilles of this terrible conclusion:

Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,

> A great-siz'd monster of ingratitudes.
> Those scraps are good deeds past, which are devour'd
> As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
> As done. (III.iii.145–150)

These are truths, ugly truths, but truths. They are founded on Machiavelli's observations about gratitude and the bad character of men at large. Machiavelli suggests that the only way to deal with ingratitude is to keep men absolutely dependent on you so that your benefactions will never be in the past.[11] Of course, the critique of gratitude could very well lead to an abandonment of concern with public opinion altogether. This lack of concern for esteem would mean, however, a turn to private life or perhaps even to solitude, a position that at first blush would seem to diminish the scope of man and carries with it its own problems. Ulysses would seem to have drawn a similar conclusion from his analysis of the problem of fame. But he also knows perfectly well that there is a kind of man who has such a hunger for fame that all the critiques in the world fail to convince him. Such a man is Achilles, and the critique has the effect only of severing virtue from glory and making glory the only end. This is, not too surprisingly, the ultimate though unintended effect of Socrates' efforts in *Alcibiades I*. Socrates is dealing in Alcibiades with another loose cannon. His comparison of the eye of another with the soul of another is intended to make Alcibiades care about Socrates' opinion. He is trying to persuade Alcibiades to seek self-knowledge in company with a philosopher. But he also knows that Alcibiades is another man with the political hunger who turns to the city for the confirmation of his self. Alcibiades remains attached to Socrates but, at best, only halfway. Socrates ruins him by releasing him from the constraints that unconsciousness of moral ambiguity would have exercised over him and by reducing the dignity in his own eyes of the public acclaim that he so avidly seeks. Alcibiades clearly imitated Achilles, as did all men of heroic ambition, from Alexander to Caesar to Napoleon, whereas the Homeric hero to whom Socrates was regularly likened was Ulysses/Odysseus. Shakespeare presents Ulysses and Achilles imitating Socrates and Alcibiades who imitated Ulysses and Achilles.

Ulysses' point is seconded, in as touching an expression of affection as one finds on the Greek side, by Patroclus, who uses the epithet "sweet" in addressing Achilles. He tells Achilles that he, Patroclus,

considers himself responsible for Achilles' loss of reputation, his affection for Patroclus having effeminated him (III.iii.215–224).

At the end of Ulysses' instruction of Achilles, he says that it was known that Achilles was keeping apart from the war because he was carrying on an affair with a Trojan princess. Achilles' motives in this play are unclear. The quarrel with Agamemnon over Briseis is not mentioned in the play, and Achilles' sulking is earlier attributed by Ulysses to his unwillingness to respect the rank order of things. Here Ulysses attributes it to a kind of treasonable connection across the lines of war, one that suits the medieval chivalry anachronistically connected with the Trojan heroes in particular. Ulysses reveals that the Greek intelligence system has knowledge of Achilles' secret deeds. He does this to show that the state is everywhere and one cannot hope to avoid its gaze. This love affair plays only a tiny role in the plot, and the death of Patroclus extinguishes it completely. Ulysses' instruction makes Achilles into a monster of glory, acquired by the reputation for virtuous deeds, not by virtue. It also shows him that his glory will have to be won in the context of the power of the Greek community. Ulysses liberates Achilles from moral concern and lowers his godlike pretensions.

Achilles' immediate response is an arousal of lust, to kill Hector. This is Achilles' authentic passion.

> I have a woman's longing,
> An appetite that I am sick withal,
> To see great Hector in his weeds of peace. (III.iii.236–238)

Act IV is devoted to bringing the two great couples—Troilus and Cressida, and Achilles and Hector—together in the same action. They represent the two interesting motives in this play, love and glory, and they both are debunked by Ulysses. War, in its unerotic necessity, separates Troilus and Cressida. Her father, Calchas the soothsayer, has defected to the Greeks and wants his daughter back with him. *Raison d'état* dictates an exchange of the girl for the hero Antenor. All the seamy sides of a Parisian-style erotic intrigue are again played out. It so happens that Troilus is, at the moment when Cressida must be exchanged, in a compromising position at her place. These are all men of the world, and they get Troilus out without a pub-

lic scandal. It is always the comedy of this play that Troilus is faithful and wildly romantic in settings and with kinds of persons more appropriate to erotic farces. Troilus' farewell exhortations to Cressida are truly enchanting, whereas her responses are only coy (IV.iv.12–137). His potential jealousy of her is of the noble kind: he fears the Greeks will be more attractive than he is and immediately confronts the insolent Diomedes, who is sent to take possession of Cressida, and who taunts Troilus with threats of fooling around with his beloved.

In scene v both Cressida and Hector are seen among the Greeks. The supposedly heartbroken Cressida is liked by all the Greek heroes, with a single exception, Ulysses. The Greeks are full of prurient interest; she loves the whole thing and seasons it with ridicule of Menelaus, who, according to Pierre Bayle, was "the most debonair cuckold of antiquity."[12] This kissing feast is promoted by Ulysses. He gets her to ask him to kiss her, and then refuses her request.

ULYSSES: I do desire it.
CRESSIDA: Why, beg two.
ULYSSES: Why then, for Venus' sake, give me a kiss
When Helen is a maid again, and his.
CRESSIDA: I am your debtor; claim it when 'tis due.
ULYSSES: Never's my day, and then a kiss of you. (IV.v.48–52)

Ulysses, avid to discredit the romantic motives, has orchestrated this little scene, and then humiliates Cressida by his refusal. Ulysses, just as he is the only one with a general awareness of the whole situation and with plans to change it, is a perfect reader of souls and their characters. His implicit and explicit opinions of Agamemnon, Nestor, Achilles, Hector, and Troilus are always perfectly on the mark. When Cressida exits, Ulysses makes a moralistic speech for the benefit of everyone there about Cressida's evident and disgusting sluttishness.

Then arrives the always gentle and enthusiastic Hector. He engages in all the formulas of knightly politeness, in which he actually believes. Aeneas speaks to Achilles of Hector's politeness and tells him that Hector cannot harm the foolish Ajax because Ajax is half Trojan. Achilles, continuing his erotic language about death, says, "A maiden battle, then?" (IV.v.87). Only the entry of the sword into the body interests him. The blurring of natural and historical differences, so characteristic of this play, makes what should be a climactic fight to the

death between the two chosen representatives of the warring sides into a ceremonial gesture between chivalrous knights bound by blood without intention of doing harm. The great fight lasts only a second, a bit like the last trial by combat in *Richard II*.[13] It turns into a pageant with the exchange of the most exquisite compliments. The Greeks are perfect hypocrites in all this; Hector is a monster of sincerity.

As Ulysses has just dispelled the shadows of romantic illusion surrounding Cressida, Achilles chills us with his brutality, rendered much more extreme by the atmosphere of chivalric gentility in war. He comes in and looks at Hector as a butcher looks at a cow. Without any adornment he wonders how he will slaughter Hector, where on his body he will make the perforation out of which his spirit will fly, how he will dismember him. This is a rhetoric to which a Hector is unprepared to respond.

Act V is devoted to Cressida's infidelity to Troilus and to Hector's death. The first of these is the darkest of the dark scenes in *Troilus and Cressida*. Ulysses, fully aware of what is going on at Calchas' tent, takes Troilus to it and gives him "ocular proof" of Cressida's betrayal. Ulysses subjects him to a terrible torture. The dog of envy, Thersites, who has just called Patroclus Achilles' male whore, slinks along to add a filthy counterpoint and conclude the scene with "Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery! Nothing else holds fashion" (V.ii.193–194). Nothing could show us more clearly Ulysses' intention to demystify the romantic ideals. The torture of jealousy here is as intense as that in *Othello*. The difference is that the jealousy corresponds to the real deeds of Cressida. We do not find ourselves rooting for the couple and hoping against hope that it will prove to be a misunderstanding. Here we recognize that Troilus is a fool, a noble fool, for believing in Cressida. He is truly alone while the whole meaning of his life is staked on his being with her.

Our sentiments are complex when we contemplate this scene. On the one hand, it is difficult not to pity Troilus and to wish that it would all work out for the best for him. But we are persuaded of Cressida's falseness and know that a man should not live in false trust. Something like this excuses Ulysses' cruelty in sticking Troilus' nose into the mess. He may not be doing it for Troilus' sake, but it is not an unmixed act of cruelty. Othello does not believe in his beloved enough. Troilus

believes too much in his. Under his own eyes he sees his beloved give his sleeve to his rival, whereas Othello had to fill in the argument that bridged the gap between his giving Desdemona his handkerchief and its possession by his supposed rival. Each one's heart was attached to the piece of cloth and was ripped out by its misappropriation. Troilus is made to pay a very high price for his opinion that "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" (II.ii.53). The noble soul creates value. But here an overwhelming reality makes it impossible to maintain a love that is not confirmed by its object.

When Troilus has been witness of Diomedes with Cressida, Ulysses says, "All's done, my lord," and Troilus agrees that it is. And Ulysses asks, "Why stay we then?" Troilus is compelled to stay in order to meditate on the meaning of what he has seen with his two eyes. What we witness is an epic culmination of the play's deepest theme, the quarrel between desire and reason. Troilus has always discussed his love as though it were equal or superior to the love of the gods. Belief or faith is his profoundest longing, although for him it is faith in the imaginations that emanate from his eros. He says "credence" gives birth to a hope that is "so obstinately strong" that it "doth invert th'attest of eyes and ears." He concludes on the basis of this logic of the heart with the question, "Was Cressid here?" Ulysses dryly responds that he cannot conjure. Troilus insists he is not mad, but goes on to exhort disbelief of what he has just seen for the sake of "womanhood" (V.ii.114–132). As we have seen, Troilus argues on the premises of moral commonplaces that he cannot bear to call into question. Here the consequence he draws from Cressida's infidelity is the infidelity of all women, especially the infidelity of mothers. The whole family moral order, which depends on the belief in the chastity of women, is collapsing. Of course, Troilus' logic is mad, taking the particular as the same thing as the general. At best, he could say, "Some are, some aren't." But this is a profound reflection of the logic of the heart or love in that when we love, we stake everything on an individual or a particular. If this particular is not the perfection itself of virtue, there is no virtue, and love as we know it disappears. Troilus has already declared himself the enemy of reason and is aware of love's inner necessity. Ulysses coldly accepts the rational conclusions from Cressida's behavior, but refuses to extend its meaning to all women. But Ulysses is emphatically not a lover. There is a war between reason and love. Unequivocal and unqualified love

wants to attach a meaning to particular attachment, which reason can never allow.

Troilus piles up questionable premise upon questionable premise and tries to draw a necessary conclusion.

> If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
> If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
> If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
> If there be rule in unity itself,
> This is not she. O madness of discourse,
> That cause sets up with and against itself!
> Bifold authority! where reason can revolt
> Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
> Without revolt. This is, and is not, Cressid. (V.ii.137–145)

This is a true conclusion. All of us who are particulars are and are not, partaking of being and nothing at the same time. But love insists on the universality and eternity of its object, and to the extent that its object is another human being, love is therefore either an illusion or a disappointment. True logic leads to human isolation, as one sees in the case of Ulysses himself, who is detached from his rulers and has no visible object of aspiration and no connections of love or friendship. Troilus' rejection of reason is based on a kind of insane attachment to the principle of noncontradiction, which is the very foundation of reason, and to the principle of causality. No speech in Shakespeare states the intellectual premises of love with such clarity. It is truly mad reasoning, but it is reasoning. If men were to turn their gaze to objects that do not admit of contradiction, there would be no problem. The question is whether one can love such objects. Ulysses can contemplate this scene without any need for self-contradiction and accept it with equanimity; he stands for the intransigent application of real reason to all things. But he is hateful to lovers, that is, to most of Shakespeare's audience. I do not think that he wishes to hurt Troilus. There is evidence that he pities him. What Troilus learns causes him to become angry and furious. He cannot learn merely to contemplate, as does Ulysses. The destruction of his ideal makes it impossible for him to live halfway sensibly as he did before. His noble enthusiasm for Cressida, and thus for Helen, and thus for war, has been effectively removed. Ulysses certainly believes that this war is

unreasonable and does what he can to end it. *Troilus and Cressida* is the only Shakespearean play where reason, understood philosophically, is the theme.

Next we see the honest and idealistic Trojans prepare for war, with Priam, Andromache, and Cassandra trying to keep their men at home while Hector is unshakable in his dedication to honor. Troilus supports him while chiding him for being too gentle, himself declaring for all-out war without fair play and without pity. His only concern now is vengeance, a particular vengeance that he never gets.

The high-mindedness of the Trojans is unrelieved, and off they go to battle, perfect gentlemen and knights. Hector encounters Achilles, who has boasted so shamelessly of his superiority to his prey, but who now gets winded and excuses himself from the fray, alleging that he is out of shape and will come back when he is in better form. Hector agrees to this because he lives by the book of chivalry, and how one wins is more important than winning. Shakespeare presents this in the style of exposé. "You know the story. Now I will give you the story behind the story." After a scene where Hector kills a Greek in beautiful armor under which he finds a "Most putrefied core" (V.viii.1), which is symbolic of what we learn about the Greeks in this play altogether, Hector disarms himself. Achilles appears and then tells his troop of Myrmidons to surround Hector. When they do, Achilles orders them to kill him. It is, as I have said, a murder, a dastardly deed by Achilles and the opposite of the kind of death wished for by Hector. Cressida and Achilles belong together in their trampling on the dignity of love and war. Achilles ties Hector to his horse and drags him around in ignominious triumph. Achilles is very much what Socrates says he is in the *Republic.*[14] He beats up on a corpse. But the successful deed of getting rid of Hector, so long as its nature is not known, guarantees Achilles eternal fame. He got a good poet. Troilus screams in despair at Hector's loss and says that the war is over. In fact, it endured much longer, but Shakespeare treats it as though it ended here.

Shakespeare's very rough treatment of the spirited, combative man is, as I have noted, not exclusive to this play. He ridicules Hector's dressing up of the harsh thing in itself with the formulas of chivalry, and he more than ridicules the butchery by Achilles. The poetic prejudice in favor of the spirited, heroic man is subjected to a powerful

critique by Shakespeare, just as it is by Plato. Warlike men are necessary, and like most everyone else, I suppose, they have their specific illusions that will enable them to believe in what they are doing. But the world is distorted by illusions, and a wise man must see through them. As far as it is in his power, he tries to mitigate the effect of these illusions. With boyish playfulness Hotspur is really just looking for someone to kill. The much more rational Hal makes fun of Hotspur's dining on deaths. Hal is perfectly willing to kill someone when it is reasonable to do so, and as a matter of fact he kills one notable person, Hotspur. In so doing, he is able to appropriate all of Hotspur's reputation at one stroke. This is reason, or the reasonableness of the political man.[15]

This leads us to a look at Ulysses. He is, I argue, the hero of the play. As we have seen, he does not always appear to be so because he represents something that is not to the taste of the audiences of tragedy or comedy: reason. This play is not satisfying to our moral sense. Achilles is not punished for his evil deeds; neither is Cressida. The only thing that rights the balance is the reasonable and just scheme of Ulysses, who takes the poetry, and hence the dangerous poison of its idealism, out of this war. He accepts it as an ugly business that reflects much of human nature and wishes to return to simple, if not honorable, peace. He is a modest presence in the play; but from his first appearance, he is not only saying the sensible things but manipulating the outcome with his profound sense of the politically necessary and his capacity to know and motivate men's souls. Ulysses does not produce a splendid or even especially just solution, but it is effective so long as wisdom does not become megalomaniacal and believe it can assure just and noble solutions to human problems. Ulysses does not hold that there are just gods upholding a providential order. What is going to be done has to be done by men with all the limitations of men, sometimes masquerading under higher apparent authorities. Ulysses' political scheme conduces, by deeds of questionable justice, to the common good, if one does not treat the common good too grandly. His goal seems to be peace, simple peace, without any need for gilding it, where a man like Ulysses, as shown by his deeds in the *Odyssey,* can take the center of the stage.

What Shakespeare has done in *Troilus and Cressida* is to subject classical heroism to a microscopic analysis. He would seem to underwrite the Christian notion that the Greek virtues are but splendid

vices. He does not merely parody love and war, but from a comic perspective shows that it is imaginations and slaughters on which they live. But Shakespeare, unlike the Christian detractors of antiquity, does not join in their criticism of the pride of reason. After the heroes have been put in an acid bath, they all dissolve except for the one man among the Homeric heroes who represents wisdom. In this sense the play is a vindication of the Greeks over the Trojans, and antiquity over modernity. The Greeks have one man who singly counterbalances their ugliness. He is Ulysses *cum* Socrates. As I have said, such a figure is not very suitable to the stage. In Prospero we see a wise man whose gaiety covers over a hardly bearable vision of life. In Ulysses we see the wise man dealing with real life, and it can be a most disheartening experience. The gods and the heroes are unmasked, and the glory that was Greece turns out not to be glory at all. This can appear to be a combination of Enlightenment-style debunking and Célinesque nihilism. But Ulysses really practices neither, for the bleak surroundings serve to set off the beauty and dignity that belong to wisdom alone and to a way of life devoted to truth without illusion. I cannot resist comparing Ulysses to Thucydides, who chronicles without hope the decay of his whole splendid world and gets an austere pleasure from it. It is a solitary life, separated from the common goals and aspirations, one that is too detached for most men to bear. Thucydides represents the theoretical life in its opposition to all the charms of practical life, and so does this isolated Ulysses, who is among the Greeks but not really of them. Shakespeare puts him next to Troilus, the honest and appealing lover, as they together contemplate the spectacle of human vice. Troilus is too involved to enjoy it or accept it. Ulysses is the opposite. There is no question that love and its promises of the unity of two human beings become strongly doubtful from the perspective of reason. What human beings can really share without potential opposition is only reason, and that is pretty thin stuff on which to nourish passionate men and women. Shakespeare's plays about lovers have a kind of irony that does not suit the Romantic temperament. Love is wonderful, but the reasonable observer cannot help seeing through it, at least a bit.

The play ends with a lighthearted address to the audience by Pandarus. In *Troilus and Cressida* very low people, like Patroclus and Thersites, are compared to the poets, and so is Pandarus, who is the only singing poet in the play. He is the pander who makes the connec-

tion between poetic imitation and the audience. Somehow a cynical reflection on the bad reputation of poets and actors would seem to follow appropriately from having seen this play. "O traitors and bawds, how earnestly are you set awork, and how ill requited. Why should our endeavour be so loved and the performance so loathed?" (V.x.37–40). Pandarus deals in a tainted kind of love that pleases most people as perhaps does the obscene side of Shakespeare. Pandarus ends by announcing that he and his audience both groan from venereal complaints, bitter accompaniments of the trade of love. In two months he promises his will will be made:

> Till then I'll sweat and seek about for eases,
> And at that time bequeath you my diseases. (V.x.56–57)

These are the last words of the play.